



# Kensington Unitarians

Newsletter: July 2018

## What's On...

Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> July, 11am-noon  
**'Anything Goes? Freedom and Responsibility'**  
Led by Sarah Tinker & Jane Blackall

Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> July, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> July, 6.45 for 7-8pm  
**'Heart & Soul: The Prisons we Make for Ourselves'**  
Led by Jeannene Powell

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July, 11am-noon  
**'Liberation Theologies'**  
Led by Jane Blackall

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July, 12.30-1pm  
**Inclusive Communion**  
Led by Sue Smith

Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> July, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> July, 11am-noon  
**'Free to Roam'**  
Led by Sarah Tinker  
and Jeannene Powell

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> July, 12.30-1.15pm  
**'Finding Your Voice' Singing Class with Margaret**

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2-3pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> July, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 11am-noon  
**'Standing Against Tyrants'**  
Led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 12.30-1.30pm  
**Bring-and-Share Lunch**

Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> July, 12.30pm  
**'Nia Dance' with Sonya Leite**

Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> July, 7-8.30pm  
**Management Committee Meeting**

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> July, 11am-noon  
**'Accessibility Awareness'**  
Led by Sarah Tinker and Joy Croft

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> July, 12.45-1.45pm  
**Sunday Conversation:**  
On the month's theme of  
'Freedom and Liberation'.

## Liberation and Freedom

### A Message from our Minister

Thomas Merton, Roman Catholic theologian and mystic, wrote: 'I have an instinct that tells me that I am less free when I am living for myself alone' and I think this is a message we'll visit a few times in the month of July here at Essex Church, as we explore our ministry theme of 'liberation and freedom'. Our freedoms and oppressions are inextricably linked. We cannot simply seek liberation for ourselves alone. Nor can we truly seek liberation of another without realizing that we too are imprisoned. Wherever injustice holds sway, all are surely enchained.



These insights are valuable, whatever level we are working upon. Take our last month's theme of 'creativity and the arts'. During the month so many of us expressed the limitations that we'd placed upon our own creative expression, sometimes after a careless or deliberate put down in our younger years. We label ourselves and our abilities: 'I've never been able to understand or write poetry' for example. Yet something in us stirs, seeks the light of day, wants to be expressed and knows its particular form of expression can only emerge *for* us and *from* our unique life circumstances. So we tentatively put pen to paper (or needle to thread, paint to canvas, spade to the garden soil) and new freedoms are found. Such freedoms are far more likely to flourish when encouraged by others. Our personal liberation meets the liberation of another and new possibilities bubble forth.

Surely the same is true in our wider society, affecting the worldwide issues of our day. Poet James Russell Lowell wrote about freedom in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and we'll be singing this verse in one of July's hymns:

Is true freedom but to break / Fetters for our own dear sake,  
And with leathern hearts forget / That we owe the world a debt?  
No, true freedom is to share / All the chains our comrades wear,  
And with heart and hand to be / Earnest to make others free.

The campaign to make slavery illegal was eventually won, by those who campaigned tirelessly to expose the moral indefensibility of its discriminatory and unjust foundation stones. But here in the 21st century we understand how great the forms of oppression are that *still* limit the freedoms of all. Unequal access to education, to finance, to permanent jobs, to clean water and adequate food, to safe homes and countries, mean that none of us are truly free. Slavery in its many forms is with us still. We cannot do everything, but we can do something. This month let's encourage one another to consider the ways we might unlock a few prison doors, in our own lives and in the lives of others. Where would you begin, I wonder?

Rev. Sarah Tinker

## In this month's newsletter...

\* Flower Communion \* Save the Date for a one-off 'How to be a Unitarian' Workshop \* Marking Refugee Week \* The Return of Essex Church Men's Group \* Poetry by Brian Ellis \* LDPA Quarterly Meetings: 'Building Effective Interfaith Bridges' & 'Facilitation Skills' \* 'Creativity and Art' reflection by Brian Ellis \* 'The World as God's Body' by Jane Blackall \* Artwork by Eliz Beel \* 'Express Yourself!' address by Rev. Sarah Tinker \* and more ....

# Kensington Unitarians

At Essex Church (founded 1774), Notting Hill Gate

Kensington Unitarians are a community of kindred souls who meet each week at Essex Church in Notting Hill Gate to explore, reflect, converse, be still, share joys and sorrows, and support one another on life's journey. We are proud to be part of a worldwide and historic liberal religious tradition.

Our main activity is Sunday worship and we hold a service each week at 11am. All are welcome. Services are usually themed and include readings from a variety of sources, prayers, music, singing, stillness, and a short sermon. Our children's leaders provide an alternative programme of activities for younger people.

Small-group activities are another key part of our programme. We offer courses and one-off workshops exploring spiritual and religious matters and considering life's meaning together with others on the spiritual journey.

If you are aware of any member of our community who is unwell or suffering in some way and who would welcome contact from others in the church, please contact our minister.



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Notting Hill Gate  
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Office Answering Machine: 020 7221 6514

Email: [info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:info@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)

Web: [www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk](http://www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk)

## 'Heart and Soul'

### Midweek Spiritual Gatherings

Thursdays 5<sup>th</sup> July, 2<sup>nd</sup> August from 7-8pm

Gathering at 6.45pm downstairs in the library  
Followed by social time and refreshments



Come and join us for our monthly alternative spiritual gathering, with music and silence, words and prayers, and a chance to explore the evening's topic in relation to your own life. As part of our monthly theme of 'Liberation and Freedom', our Heart and Soul evening will be about the prisons we make for ourselves, led by Jeannene Powell. This will be followed by time for refreshments and fellowship. All are welcome to join us. If you would like to know more about our 'Heart & Soul' gatherings at Essex Church email [jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)

## Summer Lunch

After the service on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> July



We will be holding a bring-and-share lunch after the service on 22<sup>nd</sup> July. Please save the date and look out for the sign-up sheet so you can let us know what you plan to contribute. As ever we'll be glad of help in the kitchen and clearing up on the day.

## Volunteering Rotas: Stewarding, Coffee and Greeting



### Stewarding:

1 <sup>st</sup> July:	Michaela von Britzke
8 <sup>th</sup> July:	Niall Doherty
15 <sup>th</sup> July:	Brian Ellis
22 <sup>nd</sup> July:	Alice Lambert
29 <sup>th</sup> July:	Heidi Ferid

### Coffee:

1 <sup>st</sup> July:	Richard Levy
8 <sup>th</sup> July:	Helena Coope
15 <sup>th</sup> July:	Helena Coope
22 <sup>nd</sup> July:	Maureen Cummings
29 <sup>th</sup> July:	Richard Levy

### Greeting:

1 <sup>st</sup> July:	Annie Fowler
8 <sup>th</sup> July:	Roy Clark
15 <sup>th</sup> July:	Liz Tuckwell
22 <sup>nd</sup> July:	?????? (can you help?)
29 <sup>th</sup> July:	Maureen Cummings

We circulate the rota list each month by email. Please contact Jane if you are willing to be on the rota mailing list.

[rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:rotas@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)

## Unitarians at London Pride

Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2018 – Book Your Place



For many years now members of our LDPA (London District) and other UK congregations have walked in the PRIDE march. This is always a great occasion when the streets of the West End are packed with people celebrating love and equality. Participation in the march itself requires a wristband. The LDPA only has 30 wristbands this year as demand is so high. This means you will need to commit to coming and to making our colourful group as impressive as ever. We usually meet between 12:00 and 12:30 on the afternoon. Or you may prefer to form a Unitarian Group in the crowd to cheer and chat when we walk by. Please book a place with the District Minister, Rev. Martin Whitell, ASAP: email [revdmart@aol.com](mailto:revdmart@aol.com) or mobile 07976 839 299.

## Double Issue Newsletter:

Early Deadline – 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2018

The next church newsletter will be a double issue covering August/September. Please get your articles in early and sign up for rota slots over the next two months if you can (send articles, announcements, photos, and offers of help to Jane: [jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk)). The next deadline for newsletter submissions is Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> July. Thank you!

## Essex Church Men's Group



The first 2018 Men's Group meeting was held on Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> May; and we are pleased to report that we are all in agreement that it was a hit. The purpose of this group is to create a space for men to feel comfortable discussing the male experience on spiritual, cognitive, and material matters. It is also an opportunity to socialise and bond. Our meetings are not governed by an ideal or doctrine, but rather, attendees are welcome to lead a pressing topic of their choice, as we share our perspectives, coach and learn from each other. Meetings will be held once a month and there are still spaces for anyone interested in joining. However, to create an environment where personal issues may be raised, the group will be closed to a limited number of members and rotated on a seasonal cycle.

**Jonathan Crawford**

Please feel free to email Jonathan on [jdc75@live.com](mailto:jdc75@live.com) to express your interest and keep updated on future meetings.

## Sunday Afternoon Tea Dance

Future Dances – Save the Dates:

Sundays 23<sup>rd</sup> September and 9<sup>th</sup> December 2018



Thanks to everyone who helped out with the most recent dance on 6<sup>th</sup> May and who made it such a jolly occasion! We'll be back this autumn with a beginners' guide to rumba. All are welcome!



# Flower Communion

In the service on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> July



The Flower Communion service was created in 1932 by Norbert Čapek (1870-1942), who founded the Unitarian Church in Czechoslovakia, and was introduced to the wider Unitarian and Universalist family by Maya Capek. It is an annual ritual that celebrates beauty, uniqueness, diversity, and community. In this ceremony, everyone in the congregation brings a flower. Each person ritually places a flower in a shared bowl. The congregation bless the flowers, and they're redistributed. Each person brings home a different flower than they brought. We will be holding a Flower Communion during the service on 22<sup>nd</sup> July so please bring a flower to place in our communal bowl.

## 'How to be a Unitarian'

Sunday Afternoon Workshop led by  
Jane Blackall and Sarah Tinker



Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2018 from 1.00-5.00pm  
Here at Essex Church – SAVE THE DATE

For those who missed our recent course we're offering another (somewhat abridged) opportunity to find out 'How to be a Unitarian!' Of course there are many varied ways to go about it and we'll explore just a few of the possibilities together in this Sunday afternoon 'taster' workshop.

Reasons why you might want to come to the workshop:

- Because you like coming to church... yet you feel a bit hazy about what it means to be Unitarian.
- Because you want to reflect on your own spiritual journey and moral values together with others.
- Because you want to explore the experience of being both spiritual *and* religious in community.
- Because you want to connect more deeply with fellow congregation members in a small group.
- Because you value Unitarianism and you want to play a more active part in helping it to thrive.

Whether you've been coming to church for 3 weeks or 30 years there will be something for you. Even if you don't yet consider yourself a Unitarian, but you appreciate what we do here at Essex Church, and want to come along anyway to find out more, please do sign up – the more the merrier! We need at least eight people to sign up for this event to run and numbers will be limited so **please do register for the workshop ASAP**. Email Jane (jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) if you would like to sign up or if you have any queries.

## Good Cause Collection of the Month:



### Collection on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> July

Artspace provides projects for people experiencing mental health and substance misuse problems. The project is run by a team of artists in close collaboration with healthcare professionals. They seek to provide appropriate workshops for different levels of skill and interest, including one-off projects and ongoing group sessions run in hospitals, day care services, community settings and art studios. Artspace aims to provide a supportive, non-medical context for the exploration and production of art, quality projects across a wide range of media, encouragement for clients to be actively involved in the planning of projects and the opportunity to exhibit artwork. Work at Artspace is not analysed and no previous art experience is required. The organisation currently works with West London Mental Health Trust, Central & North West London NHS Trust, Look Ahead Housing & Care, Imagine Mental Health, community mental health teams and other likeminded organisations.

For more information see: [www.acava.org](http://www.acava.org)

### Recent Charity Collections:

April 1<sup>st</sup> – Red Cross / Syria – £307.71

April 22<sup>nd</sup> – Defibrillator – £210.34

May 27<sup>th</sup> - International Rescue Committee - £154.95

## Inclusive Communion

Sundays 8<sup>th</sup> July, 12<sup>th</sup> August at 12.30pm



Once a month we hold a small-group communion, after the main morning service, downstairs in the library. A team of volunteers take turns in leading the services so we experience a variety of approaches. All are welcome to participate. If you would like to find out more about these services then please feel free to speak to Jane or Tristan.

## Thematic Ministry



Our ministry theme for July is 'Liberation & Freedom'. One of the aims of thematic ministry is to encourage people to get involved, to make the theme part of your own focus for the month. Below are some ideas of ways to explore our theme over the next month. Do get in touch if there's a particular reading or song you'd like to suggest for a Sunday morning gathering or maybe there's a piece you'd like to write for a future newsletter. Let us know. Themes coming up in the near future: August – 'Paying Attention', September – 'Advantage / Disadvantage' and 'Living our Faith' in October. Here are some ways you might engage with this month's theme of 'Liberation and Freedom':

- In J.R.R. Tolkien's classic, *The Lord of the Rings*, we watch a creature named Gollum give his life and soul over to his "precious." That which empowered him, ended up destroying him. That which was meant to feed and protect him, depleted and betrayed him. It's meant to symbolize the destructive lure of addiction and power. It's an extreme example. But this trap is also commonplace. All of us do things that we think will make us feel better but end up making us feel worse. We all have our "precious" that ends up betraying us. This exercise simply asks you to use this month to work on facing your "precious" and make some small step in letting it go. There are no complicated instructions than this: Liberate yourself from your "precious."
- The task of creating a society in which none are oppressed and all are liberated is demanding and sometimes exhausting work. How do you personally manage the balance between your own self-care and the needs of the world?
- Joseph Campbell writes *'We're in a free fall into future. We don't know where we're going. Things are changing so fast. And always when you're going through a long tunnel, anxiety comes along. But all you have to do to transform your hell into a paradise is to turn your fall into a voluntary act. It's a very interesting shift of perspective... Joyfully participate in the sorrows of the world and everything changes'*. How might a change of perspective help change your response to the troubles of our world?

*With thanks to the UUA Soul Matters group for these suggestions of ways to explore this theme.*

Sarah, Jeannene, and Jane

## Migrants Organise: London Legal Walk 2018



A heartfelt thank you on behalf of Migrants Organise, to all those kind enough to contribute to the fundraising appeal 'London Legal Walk 2018'. We had a great time walking through central London and the parks and raised over £8,000 in total for a very important cause.

Roy Clark

### 'Migrants Organise' Celebration on 20<sup>th</sup> July at Essex Church

Migrants Organise have moved their evening celebration to honour their volunteers to Friday July 20th. We are glad to be offering this important charity space for free to run this event and Roy Clark our chair will be there to welcome them as he volunteers as a mentor for the organisation and Jennie Blair will also be attending as she works with their legal team.

Sarah Tinker

## LDPA Summer Quarterly Meeting: 'Building Effective Interfaith Bridges'



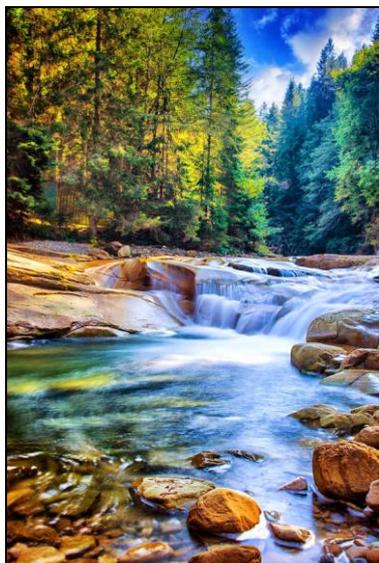
**Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> June, 10.30 for 11am-5pm  
Brixton Unitarians, 63 Effra Road, SW2 1BZ**

This meeting will include talks, a workshop and discussion time, featuring Dr. Taj Hargey, progressive theologian and liberal imam, and Dr. Jacky Woodman, LDPA council member. The meeting will look at issues relating to the Middle East, the Qu'ran, and more. Bring lunch. Drinks & buffet tea will be provided.

We are looking for people to represent our congregation at this event and can pay travel expenses to those who attend on our behalf. This is a good chance to meet other Unitarians from across the district. To register please contact the district minister, Rev. Martin Whitell, [revdmart@aol.com](mailto:revdmart@aol.com).

# OneLight Gathering: 'Turn and Flow'

Friday 13<sup>th</sup> July, 6.45 for 7pm-8.30pm  
Here at Essex Church



*'I would love to live  
Like a river flows,  
Carried by the surprise  
Of its own unfolding.'*  
- John O'Donohue

Led by Interfaith Ministers Rev Alison Trower & Rev Amy Firth this service will include music, prayer, reflection, silence, community connection & the beautiful Threshold Choir. Suggested donation: £5. You are welcome to arrive from 6:45 and we will be completed by 8:30 with tea & treats.

## Midday Recital Essex Church: Spring Day



down from a blue severed sky  
burst showering music,  
an optimism of notes high dived,  
strewn into a white walled room  
while we, imprisoned in its swirling,  
watched, as an epitome of spring,  
myriad yellow flowers cut in green  
by the season's sharp dancing leaves,  
flowed finger dazzled from the piano.  
sound and sight arcing  
between the silence that awaits  
and silence lost in time.

Brian Ellis



**Fitness Fusion of 9 Movement Forms**

**Third Sunday of the Month from  
2-3pm: 15<sup>th</sup> July, 19<sup>th</sup> August 2018**

**Midweek class on Wednesdays - 12.30-1.30pm**

An hour of whole-body conditioning, done barefoot to diverse music. Delivering a cardiovascular workout for any level of fitness. Specific routines allow you to experience - the power of the martial arts, the stillness of the healing arts and the joy of movement through dance.

**Cost £10 for drop-ins** (£8 to concessions / church members) or a block of 5 classes for £40 to use within a three month period.

## 'Finding Our Voice'

**Monthly Singing Workshops**

**Sundays 15<sup>th</sup> July, 19<sup>th</sup> August,  
16<sup>th</sup> September from 12.30pm to 1.15pm**



Margaret has worked as a professional singer all her adult life and is also a very experienced singing teacher. She is leading monthly sessions to help us all find our voice. These workshops are for anyone who is prepared to open their mouth and make a sound.

Margaret will show us how to improve the quality and strength of our voices. Using a few simple exercises we'll gain joy and confidence in singing by learning how to produce and develop the voice, something everyone can do. We'll work with the breath and overcome unconscious blocks that can prevent us singing with our true potential.

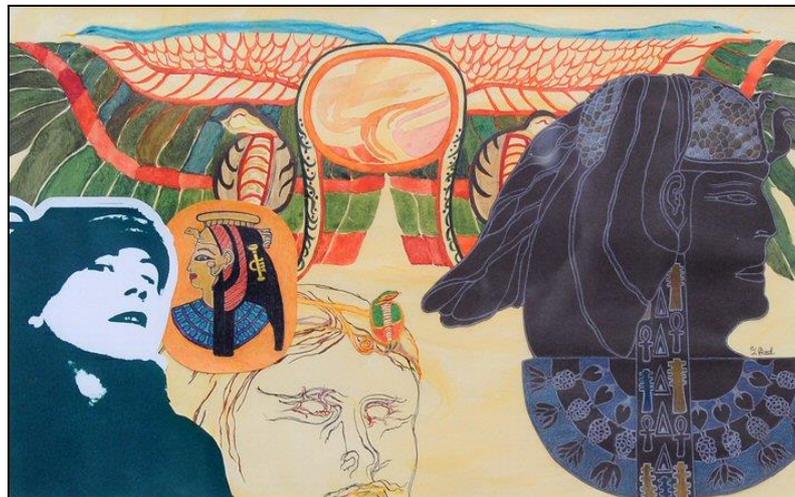
Fun and achievement are guaranteed and sessions are designed for all, whatever your experience or ability.

# Marking Refugee Week 2018



It's the 20<sup>th</sup> year for the awareness raising organisation Refugee Week. We referred to it one of our June services and appreciated these posters that remind us migration is a shared human experience. Have a look at the Refugee Week website and you'll find a suggested list of 20 Simple Acts we can all do to raise awareness, including listening to one another's stories, learning to greet people in other languages, find five facts about refugees and displaying welcome posters. Here we are after the service, one of those Sundays when we had as many visitors as regulars in the congregation, including Sean and Adrienne from Auckland Unitarians. They invited us to visit their congregation. Would anybody like to come on a congregational outing to New Zealand?! Alternatively they recommend visiting their website.

**For more information see: [www.refugeeweek.org.uk](http://www.refugeeweek.org.uk)**



*'Egypta's Gaze' – Artwork by Eliz Beel*

'Faith entails the understanding that we don't know how things will unfold. Even so, faith allows us to claim the possibility that we ourselves might change in ways that will allow us to recognize and trust the helping hands stretched toward us. It enables us to aspire to a better life than the one we have inherited.'

**Sharon Salzberg**

**LDPA Autumn Quarterly: Save the Date**

## 'Circles of Connection'

**An Introduction to Engagement Group Facilitation Skills**

**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2018 - 11am arrivals for an 11.30am start until 3pm (followed by worship and refreshments)**



The term 'Engagement Groups' is given to a particular style of Unitarian small-group activity which has the intention to enrich the spiritual life of participants, cultivate right relationship, create community, and deepen participants' connection to each other and to their congregation. In this taster session at Essex Church, led by Jane Blackall and Sheena Gabriel, we will introduce some basic principles of Engagement Group facilitation, and give some pointers to further training opportunities and resources, in the hope that participants will be inspired to set up new Engagement Groups in their own congregations.

You'll need to book in advance for this workshop (though the training is free of charge) so the organisers know how many people to prepare for, but you are also welcome to arrive at 3.00pm to attend a special worship service on the day's theme of 'Circles of Connection'. This will be followed by refreshments and time to socialise with everyone. Finish time around 4.30pm.

To book a place on the workshop or find out more, email [jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk](mailto:jane@kensington-unitarians.org.uk) or phone the church office and leave a message for Jane on 020 7221 6514.

# ‘The World as God’s Body’

Service led by Jane Blackall on 27<sup>th</sup> May

The service is also available online as a podcast.

This is the last of four services in our month on ‘Earth and the Natural World’. Today I’m going to ever-so-briefly introduce you to the work of the eco-feminist theologian Sallie McFague and an idea that was particularly important in her work: That’s the idea of seeing ‘The World as God’s Body’ (the theology otherwise known as Panentheism).

Back in the 1980s Sallie McFague wrote an influential book called ‘Models of God’. In this book (and several others) she argues that all the language that we use about God is symbolic, or metaphorical. *All of it*. No single image, symbol, story, metaphor or model of God should be taken as literally or exclusively true. God is, after all, beyond all human concepts... but nevertheless, throughout the ages, all over the world, we humans have generally felt the need to say *something* rather than nothing about whatever-it-is we intuit to be the underlying ultimate reality of all-that-is – about the meaning of our baffling, sometimes brutal, often beautiful existence – and so throughout history we have used varied images, symbols, stories, metaphors and models to point towards something vital... which we know is all-but-ungraspable with words: That which some call ‘God’.

Christianity – the tradition that Unitarianism is descended from and is still closely connected to – has traditionally emphasised certain metaphors for God more than others. The God of Christianity has most often been spoken of as ‘Father’, ‘Lord’, or ‘King’ – masculine terms, tied up with worldly power dynamics, hierarchy, perhaps – and in mainstream Christianity, the story of Jesus is of course central. Christians speak of the incarnation of God, God ‘made flesh’, uniquely in this one man – Jesus of Nazareth – in all of history. These images, these stories, these metaphors have been dominant in the west. And they may have led many of us to conceive of God in a certain, rather narrow, way. This picture of God may appeal to some – but for others, it may have caused us to reject the idea of God altogether.

But even in the Bible there are many other images used to describe God – quite different from the ‘Father, Lord and King’ model – the ‘old man with a beard in the sky’ cliché: Instead God is described as a woman in labour, a nursing mother, a beekeeper, a potter; As a wild dog, an eagle, a bear, a lion, a lamb, a dove, and a mother hen; As a cypress tree, a loaf of bread, as the clothes we put on; As fire, water, wind, rock. All of these images are true – kind of – and none of them tell the whole story. Each one of these metaphors illuminates another aspect of God. And, in turn, each one – if we were to adopt it as our favourite ‘model of God’- would shape the way that we see reality. Ultimately, the images and metaphors we choose – and it is a choice – the images and metaphors we choose to speak of God, of ultimate reality, can influence the way we actually live our lives, as individuals and societies. Our choices can influence the way we conduct ourselves, for better or for worse.

Another wonderful theologian, Elizabeth Johnson, once said: *‘the symbol of God functions... [It focuses] a whole complex of conscious and unconscious ideas, feelings, emotions, and associations, very deep and tenacious. It is never neutral in its effects, but expresses and moulds a community’s bedrock convictions and actions.’* These words from Elizabeth Johnson highlight how the metaphors we choose to use for God both reflect a community’s current outlook – on life, the universe, and everything – and serve to shape it for future generations.



So let’s go back to Sallie McFague and see what she has to say about all this. In the 1980s, when she first came to prominence as a theologian, Sallie McFague was facing up to two particular sets of concerns that had been largely neglected by theology. Firstly, she was a feminist, and she was all too aware of how Christianity, the church, and indeed the entire western world had been shaped by male-dominated images of God. As another notorious feminist theologian, Mary Daly, pointed out at around the same time, *‘if God is male, then the male is God’*. A society which uses almost exclusively male pronouns for the divine, and ‘Father, Lord & King’ imagery, is likely to turn out biased in favour of men. So McFague started to play with different images, metaphors, and models of God – most of which had some sort of precedent in scripture or tradition but which had been overlooked – experimenting with feminine or non-gendered alternatives: God as Mother; God as Lover; God as Friend. In her book, ‘Models of God’, McFague looked into each of these metaphors in turn, and explored how imagining God in different ways led to new perspectives on reality. For many people – not just women, I should say! – who had struggled to relate to God as ‘Father, Lord & King’, these alternate models can open up new possibilities for understanding. McFague encourages us all to take up what she calls ‘free theology’: an ‘experimental, imagistic, and pluralistic’ approach to the use of religious metaphor, in which we try out new models for God, and... just see what happens when we do. It’s not quite a case of ‘anything goes’; these models and metaphors must be fleshed out, their implications explored, and tested against our lived experience. But we have got a lot more freedom in this regard than some people realise. There’s not just one valid model of God – set in stone by someone else, long ago – that we must decide to ‘take or leave’.

In addition to these feminist concerns, in this classic 1980s work of theology, Sallie McFague was responding to something else (and this is the bit that is of particular relevance to this month’s theme) – she was responding to the imminent threats posed to the planet – at that time the cold war and the ever-present threat of nuclear annihilation was uppermost in people’s minds – and the scale of the environmental crisis we are collectively facing was just beginning to grasp the attention of the public at large. These two pressing concerns led her to explore another model: *‘The World as God’s Body’*. Here’s a little of what Sallie McFague had to say about her explorations. She said: *‘As I experimented with the model of the world as God’s body I came to see how loving the world is loving God. As a Christian, I no longer see God off in the sky (or even as an infinite abstraction), but as the **spirit of the body we call the earth**. God is always everywhere with each and every smidge of creation as the loving power of life to all in their sufferings and joys. The world as God’s body is a “panentheistic” understanding of God, in contrast to both theism (deism) and pantheism. In theism (and deism) God and the world are separate, abiding in different places (heaven and earth); in pantheism, God and the world are the same, without distinction. But in a panentheistic view, the world lives “within” God, insisting on the most radical transcendence and the most radical immanence...’*

## 'The World as God's Body' *(continued)*



*Eco-Feminist Christian Theologian Sallie McFague*

Sallie McFague continues: *'We meet God in the nitty-gritty of our regular lives, for God is always present in every here and now. God is with us as the source and power of all our efforts to live differently and live well... "God" is not, on this reading a distant, minimal, supernatural being but, rather, God is another name for "reality," for the reality that actually creates, fuels, sustains, and saves all life.'*

Words from Sallie McFague. There's a phrase that leaps out at me: *'God [is]... the spirit of the body we call the earth.'* I think that's a particularly good way of looking at it, and if you're just going to take away one thing from today's service, perhaps that image is the neatest one. That God is to the earth (or the universe) as we are to our bodies. Not *separate* – it is not a dualistic view. We are embodied creatures. And God is embodied in all-that-is. God is incarnate, not just in one – short, brilliant, unique – life lived in the Middle East two thousand years ago, but in **all** matter and energy, all flesh and blood, roots and leaves, fur and feathers, wind and rain, that exists and has ever existed as the universe unfolds. As McFague says: *'God is always everywhere with each and every smidge of creation.'*

The prominent process theologian and panentheist John Cobb has something similar to say: *'Every occasion in the world incorporates into its own life some aspect of the divine... meanwhile God incorporates all that happens in the world into God's own life... Everything creatures do or say or think or feel makes a difference to God. All that they are is, for good or ill, a gift to God... That means that what human beings do to other human beings – and to sparrows – they do also to God.'*

Words from the venerable theologian John Cobb (who's still going strong at 93 years old, as indeed is Sallie McFague, aged 85 now) – according to this way of doing theology, of speaking about God: if the world, or the universe, is God's body, then everything is interconnected, and interconnected *in God*, inseparably so.

Like I said before, whatever model of God we choose to get behind, the choice will shape the way we see reality, and ultimately influence the way we live, as individuals and societies. So what are the implications of understanding God in this way? How might it play out?

Sallie McFague says this: *'The model of the world as God's body encourages responsibility and care for the vulnerable and oppressed. The evolutionary, ecological perspective insists that we are, in the most profound way, "not our own." We belong, from the cells of our bodies to the finest creations of our minds, to the intricate, ever changing cosmos. We both depend on the web of life for our own continued existence and in a special way we are responsible for it, for we alone know that life is interrelated... and we alone know how to destroy it. It is an awesome and unsettling thought... This implication underscores that since God is here in our world, then surely it is indeed our neighbourhood, our planet and its creatures, that we should be caring for... If we see ourselves and every other creature as parts of the body of God – and if we see that body as the universe in all its complexity which has evolved over eons of unrecorded and recorded time – then we will realise that, whatever salvation means, it must take into account the organic solidarity of our actual situation.'*

Words from Sallie McFague – and I only wish I had time to share more of them – there are a few quite accessible interviews with her online if you want to learn more.

So... I wonder whether this environmentally-minded form of theology, the notion of 'The World as God's Body' (or even 'The Universe as God's Body') speaks to you? What do you make of the idea of seeing God as 'the spirit of the body we call the earth'?

I hope, at least, that Sallie McFague's call for us all to engage in this sort of 'free theology' inspires you to experiment and play more confidently with religious language, and to choose those constructive images, symbols, metaphors and models for God – the ones which help us see more clearly the interconnectedness of all-that-is – and which stir us up to care for our fellow beings and the planet that is, after all, our only home. Amen.

'All the world's religious and spiritual traditions acknowledge that people sometimes stray from the path of justice, kindness, and mercy. It's called sinning, missing the mark, succumbing to addictions and compulsions, or being under the influence of delusions, confusions, greed, anger, hatred, and other negative emotions. For individuals, this can lead to personal pain and suffering. When governments exhibit these tendencies, whole communities become their victims, peace is prevented, and the earth is trashed. How, then, do we respond when we see governments and organizations pursuing policies and committing acts that seriously harm people and the planet? Throughout history, the religions have offered an option: Resist!'

**Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat**

'Nature is always teaching me. When I pause amid my busy, crowded days and allow my contemplative spirit to settle into solitude and stillness, I am amazed at what I learn. Dreams waiting to be heard rise up in me as I keep company with Earth and her vast array of creatures and elements. They challenge me toward greater transformation, woo me toward deeper wisdom, and set my soul singing with the hope of fuller inner freedom. In pondering nature, I gradually moved from my small place of self into another world of existence. As I did so, I noticed a vital kinship stretching between this existence and mine. It eventually drew me back toward my life again. I saw how parts of my inner story were reflected in nature: wildflowers swaying in the breeze and little birds winging their way in the wide sky drew me to recognize the caged places of my own spirit.'

**Joyce Rupp**

# 'Express Yourself!'

From the service on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2018

The service is also available online as a podcast.

I know I'm not the only one here fascinated by discoveries of art and craft work created by our early human ancestors. 40,000 years ago or more, individuals and groups were engaging in art and craft projects: making jewellery, carving figures in bone and tusk, painting on cave walls, creating musical instruments.

Some of us went to see the recent exhibition at the British Museum on religion and beliefs, called *Living with Gods*. The first piece in the exhibition comes from prehistoric times, found hidden deep in a cave in Germany. Standing around 30 centimetres high – it's a figure of an imaginary creature – half lion, half man – carved from mammoth tusk. They estimate it would have taken over 400 hours to carve such a figure with stone age tools. That detail tells us how much early humans valued creativity and what it could bring them – access to a world of the imagination. There is a profoundly creative spirit in us humans. How much that spirit is valued and encouraged varies greatly -throughout history, throughout different societies and families, through different educational systems. I hope none of us faced the kind of education described in Charles Dickens' novel *Hard Times*. The story begins with the ghastly Mr Gradgrind, factory owner, speaking out against artistic pursuits:

*"Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts; nothing else will ever be of any service to them."*

Yet in the end, through the character of Sissy Jupe, child of a circus performer, a kind hearted and emotionally astute character, we come to realise that humans need their creativity and their imaginations – in order to be fully human. We have a part to play in the creative exuberance of the universe and our part is uniquely ours – no-one can create in quite the way that we can. Through our creativity we express the unique being that we are.

Martha Graham the innovative dancer and choreographer described it like this:

*"There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost."*

Martha Graham views creativity as dwelling within each of us, as flowing through us, and this process of flow can be encouraged and strengthened or blocked and lost.

We heard Irish writer and theologian John O'Donohue's words earlier on describing the 'treasure house of wonders' dwelling within us. Further on in his book *Eternal Echoes – an exploration of our hunger to belong*, O'Donohue describes the inner prisons we sometimes create for ourselves:

*"Fear and negativity are immense forces which constantly tussle with us. They long to turn the mansions of the soul into haunted rooms. These are the conditions for which fear and negativity long and in which they thrive. We were sent here to live life to the full. When you manage to be generous in your passion and vulnerability, life always comes to bless you."*



O'Donohue creates a rich contrast there between the soul's true nature described as a spacious and elegant mansion and the haunted room created by fear and negativity. An inner prison is a strong image. I don't know if it resonates with any of you in relation to your creative expression. For me, it has sometimes felt like symbolic prison walls need to be dismantled – in my mind – in my sense of who I am and what I'm capable of - before I can express my inner creativity. And one of the learnings that's come to me through this process is the ending of the illusion that the creativity was about me alone. My education was not as grim as that described so clearly in Charles Dickens' novel *Hard Times*. But it was an education system based on competition, on comparisons between students, on ranking achievements in a hierarchical way. I really hope that today's children are being encouraged to express themselves and value themselves for who they are and what they uniquely can bring to our material world of form. Because paradoxically – once we accept that our gifts are unique, we can move beyond limiting ideas of an artistic expression being ours alone to a far more inclusive idea that our unique gifts join in a creative whole. We are all part of the creative spirit, engaging with life, engaging in creativity as a relational activity and not an isolated, individualistic path at all.

Another prison that has ended for me is the prison of thinking that creativity can only take certain forms – painting a picture, singing a song, writing a book, knitting a jumper. Now I realise that all of life is a creative expression – how we tidy up – bringing order where there was chaos – how we work on our friendships – how we cook a meal – how we choose to dress and exercise and wash and clean – how we arrange a vase of flowers – these are all ways in which we express who we are. We are bringing our inner life out into the world and it meets the inner lives of others and creates new sparks of innovation and imagination, deepening our sense of community. And in that way – art and freedom and creativity can be a force for change in society. They can move humanity forward.

At the start I mentioned those early humans, some 40,000 years ago, engaging in creative projects for the love of it, because they could, and because their society clearly valued their creative expressions. Recent studies on cave art found in Spain now suggest that it was not only homo sapiens that valued creativity. Neanderthals too are found to have decorated cave walls and sea shells some 65,000 years ago. And of course all living creatures are creative in the living of their lives – nest builders, problem solvers, adaptable to changing circumstances. All that exists here on planet earth is engaged in a creative experiment, an exuberant expression of life itself, filled with vitality, with energy, with an unknown spark that is truly remarkable. I wonder what we'll all do next!? Amen.

Rev. Sarah Tinker

# 'Creativity and Art'

Reflection by Brian Ellis from  
'Heart and Soul' on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2018

In the final part of this evening's 'Heart and Soul' I have a few thoughts on the topic of creativity and art; two words that cover a subject that has concerned the conscious mind since it evolved, that has been delved into and written about and still is. I shall brush the lightest of feathers on its surface. I'm echoing some of Sarah's words in the last newsletter when I say that we are all naturally creative by having a brain that is conscious of itself. But if we are not encouraged to use it creatively while it grows and matures we can feel bounded and excluded in a society where creativity is categorised and made esoteric.

Watch children at play, remember playing yourselves as children. Allowed to get on with it they are spontaneously imaginative, their minds leap about unrestrained, unaffected by the trauma of failure, if something doesn't work out they move on. Their enthusiasm shouldn't be discouraged by people like Sarah's teachers who belittled her efforts at sewing and drawing. I've not met many people whose creativity as adults seems to have been hard wired in them from the start, needing only a gentle brush of encouragement on the way. Most of us need some understanding guidance to develop confidence in our creative selves. And our creativities are all different, we just need to enjoy and share it at whatever stage our creativity is at.

I recently saw a programme about Japanese culture. An interview with a professional calligrapher showed his studio to be bare, except for three large Japanese symbols written vertically on one wall. When the interviewer asked what they represented he said they meant 'learn', 'breakaway', 'transcend'. They were there he said to remind him how an artist approaches his life's work. This is similar but more tautly expressed than the saying that 'a worker uses his hands, a craftsman uses his hands and his head, and an artist uses his hands, head and heart'. We recognise when someone's art has managed to transcend, or has been produced using the three 'Hs' – hands, head and heart.

Tolstoy expressed it this way: "*Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one person consciously by means of certain external signs hands on to others feelings they have lived through, and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them*".

And Maynard Solomon said: "*Masterpieces of art are instilled with a surplus of constantly renewable energy – an energy that provides a motive force for transformation in the relations between human beings – because they contain projections of human desires and goals that have not yet been achieved or indeed be not realisable*".

But I will leave you with a different view of art from the material, with a quote from Vincent van Gogh, an artist himself but writing, since he was a practising Christian, about Jesus. I think it applies to any of the world's great religious thinkers and leaders:

*"Jesus.... an artist greater than all artists, disdainful of marble and clay and colour, working with the living flesh. That is to say, this artist, unequalled and hardly conceivable with the obtuse instrument of our modern, nervous, brutalised brains, did not make statues, nor paintings nor books; he affirmed it boldly, he made living men, immortals."*



Now I ask you to imagine you have been cast onto the fabled desert island and that you have the chance to take with you eight pieces of art and creativity – any form of artistic expression that you wish. What would you choose? I can tell you some of my choices while you have a little time to think:

I need a large island since I'm taking Norwich Cathedral – architecture, the creation of meaningful space is an art, and any of the gothic cathedrals would inspire me. I'll also need a small theatre to stage drama, let's say Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Julius Caesar*. And for dance I would choose Prokofiev's ballet *Romeo and Juliet*. The National Gallery will have to loan me Caravaggio's painting '*Supper at Emmaus*'. And Broadgate here in London will have to give up Richard Serra's sculpture '*Fulcrum*'. Jane Austen's '*Persuasion*' has to be there, and the poems of Dylan Thomas. Music? It has to be the string quintet of Schubert.

Brian Ellis

## Desert Island Artworks

*Our Heart and Soul gathering came up with their own suggestions and we continued our list in a Sunday service. Here are some of our choices for Desert Island Artwork, with apologies if your choice has been missed out of this list.*

*Chester Cathedral – Chekov's play 'Three Sisters' – Liturgical dance at St James' Piccadilly – Matisse's 'Snake' – 'Clouds' painting by Georgia O'Keefe – Rodin's Thinker – Chagall's 'Love' – Marina Bay Sands resort in Singapore – Louis Armstrong's 'Wonderful World' – Mahler's Symphony 10 – Wagner's Parsifal – Brahms violin concerto – Any abstract painting by Kandinsky – Chopin ballade No 4 – Beethoven's Diabolic Variations – Pie Jesu – King James Bible – 'Blue and white sculpture' by Hepworth – Chagall's stained glass windows – Michelangelo's 'The Slaves' – Pavane, Regina Carter's Variation – Handel's 'Messiah' – Handel's 'Julius Caesar' – Mrs Dalloway by Virginia Woolf – Thomas Ruff's large photograms – Sainte Chapelle in Paris – The Parthenon – Brideshead Revisited by Evelyn Waugh – Rembrandt's 'The Prodigal Son' – Botticelli's Venus – 'Scheherazade' by Rimsky Korsakov – Turner's 'Sunrise' – New Golden Treasury of English Verse (Pan Books) – Italo Calvino's 'Il Barone Rampante' (The Climbing Baron) – Mozart's 'Ave Verum' – Schubert's 'Winterreise' – Van Gogh's 'Arles' – Picasso's 'Minotaur' – WB Yeats poem 'when you are old and full of sleep' – Rodin's 'Les Amants' ('I'll settle for a copy...') – Beethoven's A Minor Quartet or his third piano sonata – Brahms' first string quartet – Shakespeare's Anthony and Cleopatra, King Lear and A Midsummer Night's Dream – Maeul translation of War and Peace by Tolstoy – Leonardo da Vinci The Virgin of the Rocks – Poetry of George Herbert, John Keats, Gerald Manley Hopkins... especially the poem that starts 'Glory be to God for dappled things'...*

# Services at Essex Church in July

Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> July, 11am

**'Anything Goes?'**

**Freedom & Responsibility'**

Service led by Sarah Tinker & Jane Blackall

Eleanor Roosevelt (1184-1962) is credited with saying that *'freedom makes a huge requirement of every human being: responsibility'*. In this service we'll consider how we can best hold freedom and responsibility in balance, as we make ethical choices each day, shaping the course of our lives as we go.

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July, 11am

**'Liberation Theologies'**

Service led by Jane Blackall

In this service we'll look at liberation theology, a radical movement that grew up in late-20<sup>th</sup>-century South America as a response to the poverty and the widespread ill-treatment of ordinary people. We'll consider how liberation theology has spread and evolved, giving rise to theologies which challenge oppression and injustice in all its forms, and which stir people of faith to bring about social change.

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> July, 11am

**'Free to Roam'**

Service led by Jeannene Powell and Rev. Sarah Tinker

A celebration of our freedom to walk the land and a chance to honour those who campaigned for the 'right to roam'. What other freedoms might we be taking for granted?

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 11am

**'Standing Against Tyrants'**

Service led by Rev. Sarah Tinker

Our popular annual flower communion service – (bring a flower to place in our communal bowl) and hear of Norbert and Maja Čapek's role in bringing Unitarianism to Prague. Service will be followed by our summer bring and share lunch.

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> July, 11am

**'Accessibility Awareness'**

Service led by Sarah Tinker & Joy Croft

In this service we will find out how a greater awareness of accessibility issues can free everyone to participate fully in life. This service will be followed by our monthly Sunday conversation. Do bring your lunch and stay for a conversation about this month's theme of 'Freedom and Liberation'.

# Essex Church Committee

Next Meeting - Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> July from 7pm



Gina



Roy



Juliet



Bobby



Brian



Heidi



Harold

Trustees and staff met in June and will next meet on July 26th. As always, do let us know if there are matters you would like to raise or ideas you want us to know about.

The meeting heard from Jenny our warden about some interesting new lettings including several children's summer schools. They'll be learning French and computer coding. Usually our building has a quiet time over the summer when regular children's activities take a break, but this year we'll be busier than usual. This will limit the time when we can get repairs done in the building but will also improve our lettings income.

We reviewed our regular list of building work needing attention. Its two pages of A4 are quite sobering reading, but we were cheered to realise how much progress is being made behind the scenes. We'll probably not get the hoped for electrical work done over the summer but hopefully will manage some re-decoration and re-varnishing of the parquet floors that get used so heavily. The long awaited replacement dishwasher will hopefully be installed soon and there are plans afoot to modernise the church office and make space for small meetings by bidding the giant desk farewell. We are in the midst of renewing the lease for the basement nursery, with our loyal and neighbourly Lloyd Williamson School tenants.

We noted the increase in visitors on Sunday mornings and encouraged one another to be friendly to newcomers and ensure they speak to a range of people on their first visit. Thanks to all the congregation members who make an effort to reach out to people in this way rather than simply talking to friends. It's appreciated and is a simple way to live out our Unitarian message that 'all are welcome here'.

'It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people...the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. One who takes away another's freedom is a prisoner of hatred, locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity. The truth is we are not yet free; we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not to be oppressed. For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. That is the true test of our devotion to freedom. With freedom comes responsibilities.'

Nelson Mandela, from 'Long Walk to Freedom'